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None of this is to claim there is perfection on the human level within the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church is filled with fallen human beings. We fallen mortals often do stupid things. But one experiences in Orthodoxy a palpable level of sublime spirituality and ultimate truth that transcends human failings. That's why I love Orthodoxy.



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FALLING IN LOVE WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCH*

As a teenager in 1954 I rode my bicycle across Houston to attend my first Orthodox Divine Liturgy, at the Greek Church. But not until 1973 did I begin to think of becoming Orthodox. Before then, although I found Orthodoxy interesting, it seemed rather foreign to me. And believing in the Anglican "Branch Theory," I couldn't imagine why I should go anywhere else. But between 1954 and 1973, there were great changes in my childhood Episcopal Church. By my lights they were mostly for the worse. So I began to look Romeward.

In 1973 I spent six months at the Roman Catholic Monastery of Chevetogne in Belgium, both for "r and r," and to learn French. There among the guests, and in some of the monks, I first began to encounter ideas and attitudes in the Roman Catholic Church similar to those, which so alienated and scandalized me in Anglicanism. So, rather ironically, at Chevetogne I gradually became less inclined towards Roman Catholicism.

*From *DOXA* (Pentecost, 2001), a publication of St. Michael's Skete, Canones, New Mexico. The article republished here has been edited slightly for considerations of space.



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At Chevetogne there are two chapels. One is for the Latin Rite, the other, for the Roman Catholic Eastern Rite. Half the community worships in one chapel, half in the other, with the focus on the Eastern Rite. But oddly, when I went to Chevetogne, I wasn't at all "wild about Eastern Christianity." I liked the Russian and Greek music, but I didn't like icons very much. I was fond of one or two, though most left me cold. By the time I left Chevetogne, however, I loved the Eastern Liturgy, appreciated icons in general, and was looking at Orthodoxy in a new way. When I returned to the States, I renewed a couple of casual friendships.

Reading Byzantine history for hour after hour at Chevetogne, I had begun to admire the Byzantine Empire. I wasn't so naive as to believe the Byzantines had made no mistakes, but I felt that they did succeed in establishing a rich and vibrant Christian culture. In particular I found the balanced theology of Byzantium exciting.

Several years ago I took a Haitian friend to [Orthodox] services. Afterwards he remarked "It is like a combination of Catholic and Evangelical." His perceptions were accurate, but actually it is the other way around. The modern Western churches, which diverge from each other, derive their particular emphases from the ancient Orthodox Catholic Church in the West, which held apparent opposites in balance. It is my consistent experience that the Orthodox Church still maintains that balance. For instance, to the either/or questions of the

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Western denominations, such as "Do you believe in preaching, or in sacraments?" or "Do you believe in grace, or in works?" Orthodoxy responds, "Yes." And the Greek adjectives used by modern Christian bodies to describe themselves, taken together describe, in the historical and Scriptural meaning of those words, the Orthodox Catholic Church (her full canonical name). With nearly 2,000 years of unbroken life, she is orthodox (we teach the unaltered historic Christian Faith), catholic (we offer the whole Faith to the whole world), evangelical (we believe in and preach the Gospel), baptist (we baptize into Christ, by immersion), pentecostal (we believe the historic Pentecost continues today, occurring for each believer at his Chrismation), charismatic (we believe that from the Holy Spirit we receive spiritual gifts), presbyterian (our parish clergy are presbyters, often assisted by deacons) and episcopal (we are shepherded by bishops).

In Orthodox worship I love the feeling of mystical timelessness, and the wonderful mixture of formal grandeur and informal piety. The services today have changed little since the 300s, and are in many ways similar to the service in Revelation 4 and 5, the liturgy of Heaven described in terms of first century Christian worship. I have come to delight in the spiritual challenges of the ancient and modern Orthodox ascetics. I admire the way Orthodoxy expects each Church member to be responsible for the Faith. I love the non-legalistic way Orthodoxy expects her members to be personally accountable for their own saving activities. For instance, missing church on

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